DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 194 848 CG 014 789

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TITLE Focusing on the Person: The Attitude Does Make a Difference.
PUB DATE [79]
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counseling Theories: *Counselor Attitudes: Empathy: *Helping Relationship: Personality Theories: Perspective Taking: *Professional Personnel: *Psychological Characteristics: Psychotherapy: School Personnel. Self Concept: *Social Services: State of the Art Reviews

ABSTRACT

Teachers, counselors, administrators, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals working in social service agencies have become so specialized that there is very little in common among the various approaches. In order to avoid separation and isolation of these professions and a possible decline in helping effectiveness, the common theme among these professions, i.e., the focus on human beings, must be identified. Theoretical counseling principles and constructs that may be helpful to professional educators and helping personnel include psychic determinism, holistic self-concept, unconditional positive regard, empathy, and Carl Rogers' actualizing tendency. These concepts can be useful in the understanding and establishment of strong facilitative relationships with student and client populations served by school and social service professionals. (Author/NRB)

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Focusing on the Person: the Attitude Does Make a Difference

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At times it seems as if the jobs of teachers, counselors, administrators, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals working in social service agency settings have become so specialized that there is very little in common among the various approaches. This all too common attitude can lead to a lack of communication and cooperation among the various professional groups and can even result in various degrees of competition, distrust, and restriction of outlook potentially limiting to professional effectiveness. Although based upon erroneous assumptions, this separation among professional groups accompanied by a narrowing of perspective within professions often leads to a self-perpetuating parochialism that restricts creativity and prevents that flexibility which allows for input from other fields.

In this time of declining financial resources and increased demands for accountability, it can sometimes appear easier and safer to restrict one's approach to a very narrow area and even to adhere very closely to a narrow interpretation of one specific theory or approach to that narrow area. The fallacy in this kind of parochial attitude is that, although those adopting it may be able to demonstrate their effectiveness in their narrowly-defined area, they often are unable to demonstrate accountability in the larger sense. In other words, we may be able to demonstrate that, by using our method, we can train our students or clients to pound nails at a high level of proficiency, but we may not be able to demonstrate that they can apply this skill in order to produce anything of value or to add to their fulfillment and growth.

The Common Thread

In order to avoid this separation and isolation of professions and the resulting restriction of approach and limitation of effectiveness they

produce, it is necessary to identify the common theme among all the professions mentioned. According to Hansen, Warner, and Smith (1976), searching for commonalities is a major activity in the beginning stage of a group's development before the individuals can commit themselves to the group and find cooperative ways to work together. In addition, Yalom (1975) has identified this recognition of common attitudes, concerns, or attributes as one of the eleven major curative factors in group therapy. Thus, if this parallel with group dynamics is valid, identifying a common frame-of-reference among professional educators and other helpers ought to assist in the development of a recognition of similarities and more facilitative working relationships, which can only help our students and other clienteles.

The most obvious commonality among teachers, counselors, administrators and others working in schools and social service agencies is the focus on human beings. Specifically, members of all of these professions are involved in helping, assisting, and facilitating human growth and development. The emphasis may vary among remedial, preventative, or developmental approaches and between individual, small group, or large group delivery modes. In the final analysis, however, it is the growth and development of individual human beings that is our focus, and in order to assist in this growth or development, we must make contact with the person or, as the titles of some recent workshops have implied, "you have to reach them to teach (facilitate, assist) them." A logical corollary to this conclusion is that we have to understand them to reach them.

I have found that changing perspective or looking at something from a new or different frame-of-reference has helped me to better understand the students and clients with whom I am involved in the teaching and counseling

processes. Often this perceptual shift involves remembering, reviewing, and applying some of the basic assumptions and principles about the nature of human beings to which I have been exposed, but of which it is also easy to lose sight in the moment. Therefore, in this paper, I will present what I believe are some key theoretical principles and constructs from the field of counseling and psychotherapy which I think can be most helpful to professional educators and helping personnel in order better to make contact with and understand the individuals with whom we work.

A Variety of Useful Concepts

Psychic determinism. Freud used this term to refer to his assumption that all behavior has cause(s) and meaning(s). Although Freud during some stages of analysis did focus on searching for a single traumatic incident or cause in the past for a person's current distress or unproductive behavior patterns, he worked primarily with people who had special types of problems (i.e., primarily neurotic). More relevant to the purposes of most of our work is the idea that behavior does have meaning. In fact, a corollary to this proposition, according to Freud, is that most complex human behavior is overdetermined. Therefore most behavior has more than one cause and also multiple meanings and purposes. On the one hand, then, it can be intellectually reassuring for us to know and to remember that behavior is not random and that the apparently irrelevant or meaningless behavior we sometimes encounter among our students or clients is purposeful. At the same time, the overdeterminism concept helps to provide the proper perspective and to clarify that the student or client behaving in these ways may not be responding directly to major cues from you, but may be

trying to communicate or demonstrate a picture or image of himself or herself which he or she has learned and feels necessary to portray for a variety of reasons. In fact, Freud believed that the reasons and meanings for behavior exist at different levels of awareness.

Levels of Consciousness. One of Freud's greatest contributions and one of the most important concepts in his theory of human behavior is that of levels of consciousness or awareness. It is not easy now to realize how revolutionary this concept was during the Victorian era, but it was the source of great controversy in socities (i.e., European and American) which operated on the assumption that appearance and overt or manifest statements concerning the purpose or meaning of behavior were valid and complete in themselves. Although some current psychological theorists disagree with Freud's exact descriptions of the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious, the vast majority deal, to some extent, with the importance of these multiple levels of awareness. Most of us also have experienced the situation in which we realize that some thought or information was just out of consciousness at a level which might be considered to be preconscious. In addition, we have all probably also had the sudden realization that an attitude or behavior we displayed toward another person or authority figure was partially due to our distorted perception of their similarity to a parent or other authority figure in our past, an awareness of previously unconscious meanings for our behavior. Thus, it is possible that a student who seems extremely upset because he or she has not earned an "A" on a particular paper may be concerned because of his or her belief that the teacher will be disappointed and that mother will be disappointed, but also by the unconscious

belief that the reason for father and mother's divorce and father's going away when the student was six years old had to do with the student's less than perfect achievement behavior in the first grade. Thus he or she may irrationally and unconsciously, but very strongly, feel that the reasons for father's apparent rejection is confirmed every time an "A" is not earned.

Teleological. Closely related to Freud's construct of psychic determinism is Adler's operational assumption that all behavior is purposeful or meaningful and that an individual may best be understood by discovering the purposes or goals of his or her behavior. In oversimplified terms, whereas Freud believed that the best way to understand the behavior of individuals, especially neurotics, was to uncover their past, Adler suggested that we can better understand by learning what an individual is seeking.

Here-and-Now. A very important major concept that has been adopted by a number of theorists over the last thirty years is the idea that, in order to help a person and to deeply understand him or her, we must deal with them openly in the present and through our relationship with them. Such theorists as Lewin, Rogers and Perls place great emphasis on the potential power of here-and-now relationships for helping people learn about and understand themselves and to develop and grow from that learning. In addition, the term can also be interpreted to imply a solution to the apparently contradictory past orientation of Freud and future orientation of Adler. Thus the here-and-now could be used as a focus through which to help the person understand how his or her past experiences and future expectations affect their current thinking, feeling, and behavior.

Holistic. Perhaps a holistic approach best describes the interpretation of the implications of here-and-now just given. Although a number of

theorists adhere to a holistic view of human beings, Adler and Perls were perhaps the strongest proponents of a holistic approach. Essentially, a holistic approach assumes that the individual can only be understood as a whole entity and that something is always lost when individual traits or pieces become the focus to such an extent that we lose sight of the whole person. Thus the holistic approach is anti-reductionistic. A common corollary of the concept holds that the individual is more than simply the sum of separate indentifiable and measurable parts. In fact, the Gestalt approach of Perls suggests that each person is an organized whole or pattern who behaves purposefully and must be perceived as a whole unit or entity in order to be best understood.

Self-Concept or Lifestyle. To some extent, the concepts already presented and their interpretations have logically led to the need for a concept to describe this "organized psychological system of the person that is currently thinking, feeling, and behaving in a purposeful manner related to past experiences and future expectations." Although purists might take issue with a deemphasis of the subtle differences between the terms, for our purposes the constructs of self-concept and lifestyle will both serve as labels with which to describe this organized system. Self-concept as used by a great number of psychological theorists emphasizes the importance of the way a person perceives, interprets, and values the self. Rogers' use of the term "self" as a purposeful, organizational system is perhaps most representative of the way in which the concept can be applied to working with people and in facilitating their learning and growth. Adler's use of the term "lifestyle" goes even a step further in trying to define the specific choices an individual makes and the beliefs he or she holds concerning common assumptions about life into an organized pattern, which he called the

lifestyle.

Phenomenological. A phenomenological approach to understanding human beings, as defined by Rogers, Perls, and others, implies that each individual has a unique view of the world and of himself or herself in it and that this view is both subjective and valid for that person. The subjective world of the individual is sometimes called the phenomenal field and is defined as being affected by past experiences, present stimuli, and future goals and expectations. The key aspect of the concept is that the world in which each of us exists and with which we are dealing and trying to live productively is a product of our own perception and interpretation. A phenomenological approach does not necessarily deny the existence of an objective world, but does imply that human beings are motivated by and live in a world which they have interpreted and which, therefore, is as they perceive it to be. A very obvious example of the effects of this phenomenal field is that some individuals simply do not increase the frequency of a specific behavior under a behavior modification program, which sometimes is wholly or partially due to the fact that what is reinforcing or rewarding to an individual depends on the person's interpretation. Simplistically, then, sometimes behavioral techniques do not work because "M & M's" are not reinforcing to everyone; in fact, some people even dislike them.

Empathy. This major concept in the person-centered counseling theory of Rogers is another central and critical factor in working with other human beings. Basically, empathy is a special kind of understanding that involves more than the use of the intellect. It is a deep understanding which reflects a comprehension of the other individual's unique perception of his or her experience. Empathy involves attempting to perceive and understand the

psychological world or phenomenal field of the client as he or she sees it, always remembering the "as if" quality. The latter condition is what separates empathy from sympathy, since sympathy involves losing this separate sense of identity to the extent that the sympathizer cannot distinguish between his or her own feelings and those of the other person. Rather, the empathizer attempts a deep and complete understanding of the other person's thoughts, feelings, values, and other characteristics while retaining the separation of identity. Rogers considered empathy so important that he described it as one of his six necessary and sufficient conditions for successful counseling to occur. In other words, he believed that being deeply understood is highly growth-producing, even for those who have felt blocked in their growth for a considerable period of time.

Unconditional Positive Regard. Another of Rogers' most basic concepts and also one of his six necessary and sufficient conditions for successful counseling to occur is unconditional positive regard. He believes that each of us inherently needs regard or warm recognition and respect in order to develop and grow and that the amount and nature of the regard we receive from others when we are young strongly affects our self-regard, self-concept and phenomenological view of the world. The most facilitative regard is unconditional positive regard, which is often defined as nonjudgemental warmth. It is a sophisticated concept with subtle implications not easily understood in their entirety without extensive study and training. However, there are two major important factors which the concept describes. One is the idea of acceptance of a person and recognition of his or her inherent dignity and worth simply because of his or her existence as a human being. This does not, however, imply approval

or disapproval of the individual's behavior, but rather a suspension of judgement and acceptance of the person. The other aspect encompasses the notion of warmth or caring, and this emotional discussion of the concept is also considered critical to maximum interpersonal learning and growth. Therapeutic unconditional positive regard is similar to the attitude expressed by a very close friend in whom you confide and who listens with caring and without interjecting critical or evaluative comments. Thus understanding one's frame-of-reference or empathizing is extremely helpful. The potential facilitative strength of the empathy is directly dependent upon the strength of the interpersonal relationship between the individual and the helper, which is maximized by high levels of unconditional positive regard.

The Social Nature of Human Beings. A very important basic assumption of most, if not all, theories of personality and theories of counseling and psychotherapy is the belief that humans are social beings. The person-centered theory of Rogers, transactional analysis theory of Berne as contributed to by Harris and others, the neoanalytic interpersonal theories of Sullivan and Horney, and the individual psychology of Adler all stress the importance of the need of each individual for recognition, affection, caring, interaction, and relationships with other people. For example, this social need provides a basis on which Rogers builds his counseling theory; i.e., he believes that the growth of individuals is blocked when they receive conditional regard or have to earn affection from others and then begin to value themselves conditionally, so a major tool for helping people understand themselves and begin to grow again psychologically is the unconditional positive regard offered by the counselor or other caring person through a strong relationship. Adler and

his followers have probably emphasized this social need as the major aspect of personality theory more than any other theorists. Adler's basic assumption is that human beings are primarily motivated by a need to belong with others, and this need and the style of belonging adopted (i.e., lifestyle) must be understood in order to understand a person and his or her behavior. The theorists mentioned here, then, along with many others, believe that human growth and development are dependent upon interactions and relationships with other people and that it is through social relationships that people attempt to meet their primary needs.

Ideal Self-Concept. Many psychological theorists discuss the critical importance of the ideal self-concept. The ideal self-concept is most often conceptualized as a learned image of how one ought to be or needs to be in order to be worthwhile, approved of, loved, and to belong with others. It is learned from others, especially from our perceptions of the expectations our parents and other significant people have for us during our early years. The ideal self-concept provides a goal or goals and motivates us to try to grow, become, and actualize. Some theorists stress the unconscious aspects of the ideal self-concept, as does Freud who considers it to be a part of the unconscious superego, while others such as Berne emphasize more conscious aspects of the ideal self-concept, which he represents as the parent ego state. However it is described, an understanding of the ideal self-concept and its expectations or requirements for us to receive caring and affection from others and to belong with others is very important if we are to help them grow and learn.

Life Positions. If human beings have a basic need to be cared about and to belong in order to grow, develop, and move toward actualization, it is this same need which, if blocked, thwarted, or perceived as

impossible to be met, can cause considerable psychological anxiety, distress, and unhappiness. In other words, unhappiness results when the perceived gap between the self-concept as confirmed by others and the ideal self-concept becomes too great. Defense mechanisms which distort or deny reality are used to protect against the anxiety. However, if they become habitual and are overused, the defense mechanisms can become a rigid, nonproductive style of their own, resulting in even less effective interpersonal behavior, more anxiety, more and stronger defensive behavior, and so on. Aspects of the social dimensions of this circular effect have been described in reverse as an adaptive spiral (Yalom, 1975, p.41), but in the circumstances described here may be thought of as a maladaptive spiral. All of us have probably been perplexed by the realization that we are responsible for certain maladptive behavior patterns which result in self-defeating behavior on a recurring basis. Clients and students with whom we work who are dealing with developmentally-difficult tasks or consistently engaging in maladaptive behavior often become confused when they recognize their responsibility for making choices which lead to behavior patterns that reinforce and perpetuate their unhappiness. In other words, why they would choose to behave in self-defeating or self-destructive ways becomes a crucial issue to them, and this question can, itself, lead to further distress if unanswered. There are a variety of explanations for this tendency toward self-defeating behavior, but perhaps that which is most straightforward and parsimonious, but still complete enough to provide understanding, centers on the concept of life position developed by Harris as a part of transactional analysis (1967). Berne postulated that every human being has a basic need to belong, manifest in a need for recognition from others at various levels of intimacy. Harris carried this a step

further by suggesting that everyone needs to have a social identity or a view of the worth of self and others, and that this identity needs continual confirmation from others. Learned in the early years, there are four common life positions or social identities from which one can choose. The most productive is I'M OK - YOU'RE OK, which implies that one has unconditional positive regard for self and others and which is not based on any evaluation. It is, then, a recognition of and belief in the basic dignity and worth of all human beings. According to Harris, the life positions are learned and one is adopted by each individual during the early formative years. The most common is I'M NOT OK - YOU'RE OK, which results from conditional regard. The other two positions, believed to be most nonproductive and socially maladaptive, are I'M OK - YOU'RE NOT OK, which can be sociopathological in its extreme, and I'M NOT OK - YOU'RE NOT OK, which can become suicidal in its extreme. Throughout life, unless a great deal of effort is made to change the life position, an individual will continually seek reactions or strokes from other people to confirm this position or identity. Thus, one who believes I'M NOT OK will seek and behave in ways to elicit negative reactions from others. The reason that this need for constant reaffirmation is so strong is that the life position is the social identity, and without a social identity, one does not feel that he or she belongs or has any identity at all. Thus the more maladaptive life positions may be viewed as nonproductive ways of belonging, which are motivated by a social need, even if the manner of meeting that need is mistaken or maladaptive. Under the appropriate circumstances, an inquiry which asks if a self-defeating behavior or pattern of behavior might be related to a need for recognition from others often elicits a strong

recognition response and sense of understanding, even from young children. What is especially helpful is that the understanding of the motivation for one's self-defeating behavior generally provides a sense of security and relief that the behavior is understandable and potentially changeable and manageable.

Actualizing Tendency. It seems to me that, in order to be a really effective helper or educator, one must have an optimistic outlook concerning human nature and a strong attitude of unconditional positive regard. This is not to suggest that a naive, gullible, or Pollyana-like point-of-view is appropriate, but rather that it makes little sense to attempt to help people learn and grow by applying psychological principles through interpersonal relationships unless one assumes that the results will lead to a better world for individuals and society. It is sometimes very difficult to maintain a positive, hopeful, and optimistic outlook when dealing with a person who feels so lost, confused, and inadequate that they do not believe there is any hope. Many professionals rely upon their philosophical assumptions and even spiritual beliefs in these cases to help them maintain their hope in working with severely discouraged individuals. Rogers has included a philosophical assumption in his theory which can also be quite useful in these situations, that of the actualizing tendency. He believes that every human being has an inherent propensity to maintain and enhance the organism. Thus he hypothesizes that people will naturally both preserve themselves and seek to grow or move toward actualization, as long as this tendency is not blocked by conditional caring from self and others. Therefore, Rogers believes that, if a facilitative atmosphere is provided through a warm, accepting, understanding relationship or relationships, an individual

can understand, assume responsibility for, and have unconditional regard for self, and will then naturally and automatically remove whatever block existed and begin again to live and grow productively. By adapting and applying this assumption, helpers and educators can more comfortably use facilitative techniques productively, while avoiding the inappropriate development of nonfacilitative dependency among students and clients.

Summary

A number of concepts from theories of personality and of counseling and psychotherapy have been presented. The purpose has been to assist educators and helping professionals to better understand the psychological aspects of their interactions with their students and clients so that these professionals can more effectively assist students and clients with their learning and growth. For the most part, the psychosocial or interpersonal aspects of our professional activity have been emphasized, because it has been found that the human relationship aspects of learning profoundly affect the nature and amount of learning and growth achieved.

What conclusions can be drawn from this presentation? In order to maximally help others to learn and grow, we need to recognize that their behavior is meaningful and represents attempts to be cared about, accepted by, and belong with other people and that the ways in which they expect to belong are determined by their own subjective view of the world, which is influenced by their present interpretation of past experience and future expectations. A genuine caring acceptance and empathic understanding of one's phenomenological viewpoint can greatly increase the strength of facilitative relationships, which, in turn, assist in the individual's ability to remove developmentally-difficult or maladaptive blocks to the natural tendency to maintain and enhance the self. For those who wish to

learn more about the theories and concepts presented here, excellent chapters are provided in Patterson (1973), Corsini (1979), and Sahakian (1976). In addition the original works of some of the theorists might be of interest, such as books by Rogers (1951, 1961, 1969) and Berne (1964, 1966). Perhaps the process now sounds easier than it actually is. However, by remembering these assumptions and applying the concepts to whole, unique human beings on a personal level, your helping or teaching effectiveness will increase.

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